PATRIOT ITEM > PATRIOT ITEM NEWS

What is Goschenhoppen?

Patriot photo by Lisa Mitchell. More than 300 cars, trucks and motorcycles, new and old, were on display at KutztownaEURTMs Muscle on Main, a car show that

closed down four blocks of Main Street on Saturday.

By **BOB WOOD**
UPDATED: August 22, 2021 at 4:30 a.m.

Recently someone asked me, 'What religion is Goschenhop-

pen? Take the Old Goschen-

hoppen Church, what religion is that?'

Goschenhoppen is not a religion. It is the name of a folk-region. Eighteenth century maps use the name, with various spellings, for the area of northern Philadelphia County (Montgomery County today) in the Upper Perkiomen Valley. The Diary of David Schultze (a Schwenkfelder farmer and surveyor who lived in the Upper Perkiomen Valley in the mid-eighteenth century) frequently refers to his home area as 'Goschenhoppen.' Numerous spellings exist, but the Historians use the more Germanic spelling of the name.

The folk name was used from the time of the earliest settlement. In 1743, Theodore Schneider, S.J., who started a Catholic mission in present day Bally, used the name 'Cushenhoppen' in his register.

From John C. Wenger in History of the Franconia Mennonite Conference we read a definition of the Goschenhopen Region, 'In the colonial period that part of the Perkiomen valley north of the present borough of Schwenksville was called Goschenhoppen. The lower part (nearer Schwenksville) was called Old Goschenhoppen and the region further upstream was called New Goschenhopen.

Within the Goschenhoppen folk region, as with this whole region, there prevailed a diversity of settlers with Germanic folk culture as well as diverse religious beliefs. For the early settlers, their folk culture depended on the area of emigration in the Germanic provinces. Over the years the varieties blended or melded into a more or less single, but localized, Pennsylvania Dutch folk culture.

The term Pennsylvania Dutch causes confusion, since the word 'Dutch' suggests wooden shoes and wind-mills. But the word 'Dutch' of Pennsylvania Dutch (R) is actually a corruption of the term 'Deitsch' meaning German. Since the local population have, from the beginning, used the term 'Dutch' to refer to themselves, it is the preferred term among the Goschenhoppen Historians.

In the decades following World War II it became obvious that the Pa. German folk culture of Upper Montgomery County, which had existed since the early 18th century, was rapidly passing away. The use of the German dialect was diminishing, farm auctions saw items of the material culture sold and dispersed while the farms themselves were often broken up for tract housing.

Concerned that nothing was being done to record and preserve two and a half centuries of unique farm and village culture, in 1961 local folk life scholars began meeting and discussing the passing scene with like minded people. After meeting informally for a few years, in 1965 they incorporated into the Goschenhoppen Historians. The organization was chartered to collect, preserve, and present to the public the folk culture. In 1967 at the Old Goschenhoppen Union church in the village of Woxall near Sumneytown, the Historians organized the first 'folk festival' with about thirty demonstrations of traditional Pennsylvania German activities. The second festival had about forty demonstrations as well as a stage program and food sales. The next year it moved to New Goschenhoppen Park, East Greenville, where it grew and prospered for thirty nine years until it was relocated to the Antes Plantation in 2007.

The late 'Abe' Roan, a charter member of the 'Historians,' wrote in a 1996 issue of Pennsylvania Folk life magazine: 'In the 1960s most preservation societies in the United States existed to protect and maintain historic buildings and paper items. The Goschenhoppen Historians, however, were committed to a European model of historical and folk cultural research which broadens the base of study to include languages and dialects, folk beliefs and folk practices, material culture, and geographic, historic, and religious influences. Utilizing these cross-cultural studies the full range of a culture ' and the subtle relationships that make it function ' can be better and more completely understood.'

Among the several ways that the Historians fulfill their mission, the premier event is the Goschenhopen Folk Festival. This year's festival will be held, rain or shine, on Friday, August 12, noon to 8 p.m. and Saturday, August 13, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. at the Restored Henry Antes Plantation on Colonial Road just off of Rt. 73, Big Road. The Historians website www.goschenhoppen.org gives directions to the Festival site as well as more background information on the Festival as well as other events.

Originally Published: August 3, 2011 at 5:48 a.m.

2011 > August > 3